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SENSITIVE

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS USAID FOR ANE/TS - SAULS
LABOR FOR ILAB
BANGKOK PLEASE PASS TO G/TIP SR. COORDINATOR MARK TAYLOR

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SUBJECT: TIP: PHILIPPINE REACTION TO THE RELEASE OF THE
ANNUAL REPORT

REF: A. STATE 89010

- [1](#)B. MANILA 2599
- [1](#)C. MANILA 2193

[1](#)1. (U) This cable is Sensitive but Unclassified -- Please handle accordingly.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary: Local reaction to the Philippine narrative of the 2005 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report has been mixed, though basically positive. The media response -- aided by Mission's extensive outreach efforts -- has been straightforward and informative. Philippine government reaction has generally been constructive, though there was some disappointment that the Philippines remained on the Tier Two Watch List. On June 5, in direct response to the report, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo announced the creation of a new interagency group to fight TIP. Anti-TIP NGOs have roundly praised the report. Mission continues to drive home the points made in the report and to encourage concrete action by the GRP. End Summary.

Media Reaction

[1](#)3. (U) Local reaction to the Philippine narrative of the 2005 TIP Report has been mixed, though basically positive. The media response -- aided by Mission's extensive outreach efforts -- has been straightforward and informative. On June 4, all major television networks carried news of the release of the report in Washington during their evening news broadcasts, and there was also some coverage June 5 in the print media. On June 6, Mission showed a videotape of the Department's press event hosted by the Secretary and Ambassador Miller. Acting Polcouns then gave a presentation on the Philippine chapter of the report and answered journalists' questions. Media coverage of the event highlighted the key USG point that convictions for TIP crimes are necessary, with one major daily noting that none of the reporting period's 348 convictions in the EAP area were in the Philippines. On June 8, Mission's "Virtual Consulate Davao" hosted a live chat with Acting Polcouns to discuss the report. There was significant participation in the chat, including from Mindanao. Undersecretary of Social Welfare and Development Lourdes Balanon, a key GRP official involved in trafficking issues, joined the chat and highlighted the government's commitment to fight TIP. Mission also posted the Philippine narrative of the report on its web site, as well as a link to the entire report. The Philippine narrative has also been placed on Embassy Manila's SIPRNET site.

[1](#)4. (U) A sampling of some press reaction follows:

-- The Manila Times editorialized that "the report is an eye-opener." The editorial asked readers if they can live with "the notoriety of being labeled a country that abets human trafficking" and stated that there is "no excuse for the government not to take trafficking head-on."

-- The Philippine Star reported that Tier ranking standards are applied equally to every country.

-- The Philippine Daily Inquirer emphasized that the GRP is "in danger of losing US aid" if further steps are not taken against trafficking.

-- "What's On and Expat," a local weekly for expatriates with a large circulation, covered the report with the front-page headline: "Human Trafficking: Still a Major Problem," giving prominent, factual coverage to remarks by the Secretary and Ambassador Miller at the June 3 press event.

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GRP Reaction

15. (SBU) Philippine government reaction has generally been positive. (Note: See Ref B message reporting on the official delivery of the Philippine narrative to the Department of Foreign Affairs.) On June 5, in direct reaction to the report, President Arroyo announced that the GRP would form a new interagency group to fight TIP, which would be chaired by Merceditas "Mercy" Gutierrez, a close adviser to Arroyo and her legal counsel. The same day Arroyo also ordered the Bureau of Immigration to intensify its efforts against trafficking syndicates. When asked about the report, Presidential Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye remarked that the GRP "is doing everything possible to arrest and prosecute those involved" in trafficking and that the issue was "one of the concerns of the government." Secretary of Justice Raul Gonzalez, obviously upset that the Philippines remained on the Tier Two Watch List, reacted on a down note, commenting in reference to the report: "These are sweeping statements if not an outright criticism of our judicial system." Gonzalez attempted to justify the slowness of the judiciary system by referring to the GRP's commitment to due process.

16. (SBU) A sampling of other official reaction follows:

-- Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto Romulo told the press that the GRP has plans to expedite prosecutions by setting up special TIP courts.

-- Executive Director of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women Emmeline Verzosa told poloff that the GRP and the USG are "of one mind" on TIP.

-- Chairman of the Presidential Anti-Illegal Recruitment Task Force Reynaldo Jaylo told the press that the Philippines has a slow judicial system, but must do more to halt trafficking. He added that prosecuting and convicting traffickers is "not as easy as shooting (them) down...and ending what they do for good."

-- On June 15, Chairman of the GRP-owned Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation and presidential confidant Efraim C. Genuino met with poloff at his (Genuino's) request. He used the meeting to underscore that the GRP plans to work closely with the Japanese government and the USG to end trafficking of Filipino "entertainers" overseas.

NGO Reaction

17. (U) Key NGOs welcomed the report. Some reaction follows:

-- International Justice Mission Acting Executive Director Sam Inocencio told poloff that he agreed that the main problem for the Philippines in terms of TIP was its slow judiciary. He pointed out to poloff that the lack of a national TIP database remained a major obstacle.

-- Visayan Forum Foundation (VFF) President Maria Cecilia Flores-Oebanda expressed gratitude for the report's inclusion of her NGO as an example of public-private partnerships in the report, and she noted to poloff that VFF would like to expand its work.

-- Development Action for Women Network Executive Director Carmelita Nuqui agreed with the report's key points, stating in a meeting with poloff that the GRP "has to exert more effort to combat trafficking."

-- Head of the National Office of Mass Media and longtime Amcit anti-TIP activist Father James Reuter, Jr. hailed the report's accuracy in a congratulatory note to poloff, calling it "excellent."

-- Friend of the Overseas Contract Workers, an advocacy group sometimes critical of the USG, wrote to poloff that the report "depicts an objective picture."

Comment

18. (SBU) The TIP report carries a great deal of credibility and weight in the Philippines, and the GRP was clearly disappointed that the Philippines remained on the Tier Two Watch List. The government's reaction, however, was basically constructive. It is not exactly clear how the new interagency group created by Malacanang will fit in with all the other GRP offices and groups working on the issue, however. We do not have any further information regarding the Foreign Secretary's mention of the possible creation of special TIP courts. Mission will continue to drive home the points made in the report and encourage concrete action by the GRP. Upcoming events include the June 18-21 visit of G/TIP Senior Coordinator Mark Taylor and a PAS-sponsored "Achieving Trafficking Convictions" conference for law

enforcement officials, prosecutors and judges that is slated to be held in June or July (Ref C).

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